

## **MOSES AS A STATESMAN**

*Bible Readings:* Exodus 20:1-17; Numbers 13:1-33; Deut. 34:1-12; Acts 7:20-50

After leaving Egypt, Israel spent the next forty years wandering in the desert that lies between Egypt and the Promised Land. During these years Moses showed himself to be one of the greatest statesmen of all history. We realize the tremendous task he had when we remember that Moses took from Egypt an unorganized band of slaves and molded them into an efficiently governed nation before they entered Canaan. Traveling across a desert with such a large group of people was difficult. Children got tired, animals had to be fed and watered along the way, and enemies sometimes attacked. Much of the trouble they brought on themselves, but Moses was a faithful and wise leader through it all.

### **The Divine Law**

From Egypt the people headed for Mt. Sinai under the leadership of Moses. Along the way they grumbled and complained to him about the hardships of traveling in the desert. Each time God provided. Fresh water flowed from a rock when Moses struck it with his staff, and manna fell from the skies to feed them.

Finally they reached Mt. Sinai in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula, and Moses was called back up to the same place where he had seen the burning bush. But this time it was to receive the law for the new nation of Israel. The law was Israel's constitution and it governed every area of their life. It is much bigger than the Ten Commandments. The Mosaic Law is found in the second half of the book of Exodus and falls into three categories, or sections.

#### 1. The Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17)

These governed Israel's moral life. The Ten Commandments were written on two tablets of stone. Although they were given to Israel, they are so basic to good living that they form the basis for moral living in all civilizations, even where they are not known. In summary they are:

- I. You shall have no other gods before me.
- II. You shall make no idols.
- III. You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.
- IV. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- V. Honor your father and mother.
- VI. You shall not kill.
- VII. You shall not commit adultery.
- VIII. You shall not steal.
- IX. You shall not bear false witness (lie).
- X. You shall not covet.

## 2. The Judgments (Ex. 21:1 – 24:11)

This part of the law contains regulations that were meant to govern the general conduct of the people, their civil life. It contains rules about people who hurt each other in quarrels, thieves, accidents that result in injury, and almost every area of Israel's community life. God is very prominent in these laws, and offenders are to be brought before the Lord. For example, to persecute someone is against the law, and God hears their cries for help. Cheating is wrong because it is unlike God, who is generous.

## 3. The Ordinances (Ex. 24:12 – 31:18)

This part of the law governed Israel's religious life and gave them the proper way to worship God. Aaron and his sons, from the tribe of Levi, were designated by God to be the priests, and this section of the law told them how to carry out their duties. This section also instructs Israel about the special holy days that they are to observe during the year.

## The Tabernacle

While he was on the mountain Moses also got instructions for building the tabernacle, the most important structure ever built. It was designed by God to be the center of Israel's worship, the place for all their religious ceremonies. Although it was very large, God designed it to be completely portable so they could move it as they traveled through the desert, setting it up each time they camped. The tabernacle was made of the finest materials – gold, silver, bronze, and beautiful fabrics. It served Israel for several hundred years. A study of the structure of the Tabernacle reveals many powerful illustrations of God's work of redemption.

## Israel, a Theocracy

More than anything else, Israel was a *theocracy* – a nation ruled by God. All of their laws were much more than a wise legal code. They expressed God's specific will for the governing of his people. Israel was to be a holy nation, separate from all other people and obedient to God. He made a covenant with them in which he promised to be their God and they promised to be loyal and obedient to him. They often failed to keep their half of that contract, but God graciously maintained his commitment. There are many forms of government – democracy, monarchy, dictatorships – but only Israel had a government run by God himself.

## Israel's Failure

Israel spent two years at Mt. Sinai, receiving the Law and building the Tabernacle. When they left, it was to head northeast toward the Promised Land, the land God told their father Abraham would be for his descendants. When they arrived at a place called Kadesh-Barnea, at the southern edge of Canaan, God told them to send in spies, one from each tribe, to search out the land in preparation for conquering it. Twelve men spent forty days searching out the land while the nation waited. (The tribe of Levi was often not included in things

like this because they were assigned the duties of the priesthood.) The spies brought back samples of the fruit that grew in the land to show how big it grew and how much of it there was. But they also reported that the land had great walled cities and fierce warriors, and that Israel had no hope of ever defeating them.

Only two of the twelve spies, Joshua and Caleb, urged the people to trust God and enter the land. They told the Israelites that if God could get them out of Egypt he could certainly get them into their Promised Land. But the people chose to believe the advice of the ten spies, and when they put it to a vote of all the adult males the Israelites decided to turn back and not enter the land.

God was angry at their lack of faith. He told the Israelites that as punishment they would wander in the desert for another 38 years. These 38 years plus the two they had spent at Mt. Sinai totaled 40 years in the wilderness, one year for each day the spies were in the land. During that time all who participated in the decision to not enter the land would die in the wilderness, and the next generation would inherit the land promised to their forefathers. God said only Joshua and Caleb would survive to enter the land because they believed God would provide. So Israel wandered in the desert aimlessly for the next 38 years.

## **Punishment and Death of Moses**

Near the end of their wanderings Israel complained to God because they came to another place where they could find no water. When this happened the first time, on the way from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, God told Moses to strike a rock with his rod. This time God told Moses to speak to a rock and water would come out. But Moses and his brother Aaron were so angry at the Israelites that Moses struck this rock too. Because of Moses' disobedience, and Aaron's participation with Moses in this act, God told them that although they would lead the new generation of Israelites up to the edge of the Promised Land, they themselves would not be allowed to enter it.

This probably seems like very harsh punishment for two men who were angry at the people's grumbling against God. But God holds his leaders to a very high standard of obedience.

Finally, at the end of the 38 years of wandering, Israel arrived at the edge of the Promised Land, this time on the eastern side, across the Jordan River. Moses realized the time of his death was near so he gathered the Israelites together and blessed each of the tribes. Then he went up Mt. Nebo where God let him look at the Promised Land. He died on top of that mountain at the age of 120, and the Bible says, "his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone" (Deut. 34:7).

**Questions**

- 1-3. The Mosaic Law contains three sections. Name them and tell what each section covers.
4. What is a theocracy?
5. How long, total, did Israel spend in the wilderness?
6. Why did they wander?
7. What was the name of the place where they first approached the Promised Land?
8. Why didn't God let Moses enter the Promised Land?
9. Who followed Moses as Israel's leader?
- 10-14. List the first five books of the Bible and give the meaning for each of the names.
15. What is the name of the fifth dispensation?
16. What is the test for this dispensation?
17. Who is Party Number 2 for this dispensation?